

## The CIA

# Situation vacant, discretion needed

WASHINGTON DC

**A**T THE age of 67, William Webster is retiring as head of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). He has been in senior jobs in Washington since 1978, when Jimmy Carter appointed him to head the FBI. He became director of central intelligence (DCI) in 1987. The agency has managed to keep out of trouble since then and, say Mr Webster's friends, he is keen to leave while it is still in good odour.

This may not be the only reason. In Congress, the relevant committees are looking at the way in which intelligence-gathering is organised (on the CIA's organisational charts, the "intelligence community" is made up of no fewer than 12 separate operations). Mr Webster believes that it would be better for a successor to deal with congressional recommendations. His decision to go

gives credibility to the view that George Bush (DCI himself for a year in the 1970s) thinks that some rationalisation is in order.

The impulse for looking at the way intelligence is gathered is the changing nature of the Soviet threat. Critics of the CIA have always said that it is full of sovietologists and not much else. The Gulf war, they maintain, showed a weakness in the CIA's non-Soviet operations. Mr Webster, say congressmen, changed his mind on the effectiveness of sanctions against Iraq. (Mr Webster responds that it was consistent to believe both that sanctions would cripple the Iraqi economy and that this crippling would not end Iraq's occupation of Kuwait.)

Speculation about Mr Webster's replacement centres on Robert Gates. Mr Gates, who was William Casey's deputy, was Ronald Reagan's first choice for DCI after Casey died in 1987. The Senate would not confirm him, believing him implicated in the Iran-contra scandal. But because Casey was up to his neck in the scandal, it does not follow that Mr Gates was; the director liked doing things off the books, even when the books were kept in his own safe. As it happened, the Senate's rejection did not hurt Mr Gates (another sovietologist): George Bush made him deputy national security adviser. Since 1989 he has been closer to the centre of decision-making than Mr Webster.

But the Senate may not be ready to decide that Mr Gates has done enough penance for being Casey's deputy. Congressional sources wondered if the White House really wanted to go through the long confirmation process that Mr Gates's nomination might involve. The whole arms-to-Iran mess is back in the news now that the "October surprise"—the allegation that in 1980 the Reagan-Bush campaign had dealings with Iranian hostage-takers—is in play once

more. So three names other than that of Mr Gates have been heard on Capitol Hill: James Lilley, now ambassador to China; Bobby Inman, a retired admiral who was deputy director of the CIA in the early 1980s; and Warren Rudman, a Republican senator from New Hampshire.



Nothing hidden in your safe, Mr Webster?

Newsweek

Time

U.S. News & World Report

The Economist p22

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